

## Message Text

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43

ACTION EB-07

INFO OCT-01 NEA-10 ISO-00 XMB-04 TRSE-00 PA-02 PRS-01

USIA-15 RSC-01 BIB-01 OPIC-06 AID-05 EUR-12 /065 W

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R 261542Z DEC 74

FM AMEMBASSY BEIRUT

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 2018

USDOC WASHDC

INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN UNN

AMEMBASSY BAGHDAD UNN

AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS UNN

AMEMBASSY CAIRO

AMEMBASSY JIDDA

AMEMBASSY KUWAIT

AMCONSUL DHAHRAN

UNCLAS BEIRUT 15334

EO 11652: N/A

TAGS: ELTN, ETEL, BEXP, XF, SA, SY

SUBJECT: RAILWAYS; \$1 BILLION SAUDI-SYRIA PROJECT BRUITED

REF: STATE 259562, 271974; JIDDA 7385

SUMMARY: BEIRUT WEEKLY REPORTS THAT KING FEISAL'S VISIT SYRIA JANUARY MAY REVIVE ON-AGAIN, OFF-AGAIN PROJECT TO RECONSTRUCT HISTORIC HIJAZ RAILWAY FROM DAMASCUS TO MECCA AND JIDDA. WITH SIDE-PROJECTS, OVERALL PROJECT MAY TOTAL \$1 BILLION. POSSIBILITY SHOULD BE BROUGHT ATTENTION FORTHCOMING RAILWAY EQUIPMENT AND TECHNOLOGY MISSION. END SUMMARY.

1. REFTELS DISCUSS RAILWAY EQUIPMENT AND TECHNOLOGY TRADE MISSION TO AREA EARLY 1975. FOLLOWING OF DIRECT INTEREST MISSION.

2. DEC 21 ISSUE OF SIX-MONTH-OLD BEIRUT WEEKLY, MEMO-MIDDLE EAST MONEY, REPORTS THAT AMONG SEVERAL LARGE UNCLASSIFIED

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PROJECTS TO BE DISCUSSED DURING SAUDI KING FEISAL'S LATE

JANUARY VISIT SYRIA IS SCHEME TO REBUILD AND EXTEND DAMASCUS-MEDINA HIJAZ RAILWAY, BUILT 1908 AND PARTIALLY DESTROYED WORLD WAR I BY ARABS UNDER LAWRENCE OF ARABIA. LINE NOW RUNS FROM DAMASCUS TO TABUK, 60 MILES SOUTH OF JORDAN BORDER. IT DESCRIBED AS ONE-METER GAUGE LIMITED TO 15-TON AXLE LOAD AND 25 MMPH.

3. ACCORDING MEMO, PROJECT WOULD BUILD ENTIRELY NEW 1.45-METER LINE WITH CAPACITY OF 45 TONS AND 75 MPH FROM DAMASCUS TO MECCA AND THEN TO JIDDA FOR BOTH FREIGHT AND PILGRIM TRAFFIC. SYRIANS ALSO WISH EXTEND LINE FROM DAMASCUS NORTH TO HOMS TO CONNECT WITH INTERNATIONAL NETWORK TO EUROPE, ENABLING EUROPE-JIDDA THROUGH LINE. MEMO ADDS THAT SYRIA ALSO INTERESTED IN RAIL LINE FROM DAMASCUS TO KUWAIT VIA BASRAH, PROJECT FIRST PROPOSED IN 1890S. SAUDIS PRESUMABLY WOULD FINANCE MOST OR ALL OF THESE PLANS, WHICH MAY TOTAL \$1 BILLION.

4. SAUDIS ALSO REPORTED DESIROUS OF EQUIPPING LINE WITH MODERN TELECOMMUNICATION SYSTEM.

5. MEMO SAID SAUDI MINISTER OF COMMUNICATIONS VISITED DAMASCUS EARLY DECEMBER AND AMMAN TWO WEEKS AGO TO DISCUSS PROJECT. JORDAN TRANSPORT MINISTER REPORTEDLY AGREED TO PLAN.

COMMENT: ACCORDING "EASTERN ARAB RAILWAYS - A MARKET RECONNAISSANCE" PUBLISHED RECENTLY BY USDOC, THERE HAVE BEEN SINCE EARLY 1960S THREE ATTEMPTS TO REBUILD PORTIONS HIJAZ LINE, THE LAST BY A BRITISH-LEBANESE COMBINE WHICH CEASED WORK IN MID-1969. TONE OF MEMO REPORT, WHOSE SOURCE IS AN ANONYMOUS CORRESPONDENT, IS THAT ALL THAT IS NEEDED IS SAUDI FINANCING. EMBASSY NOT IN POSITION TO CONFIRM REPORT BUT NOTES THAT SYRIANS GREATLY INTERESTED IN CAPTURING LARGER SHARE OF TRANSIT TRADE TO ARABIAN PENINSULA AND THAT SAME ISSUE OF MEMO ASSERTS THAT OVERLAND TRUCK COSTS FROM BEIRUT TO PENINSULA HAVE DOUBLED PAST YEAR. VIRTUALLY ALL TRANSIT TRAFFIC NOW MOVES BY TRUCK.

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## Message Attributes

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**Capture Date:** 01 JAN 1994  
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**Review Authority:** MorefiRH  
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**Review Content Flags:**  
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**Review History:** RELEASED <26 JUL 2002 by reddocgw>; APPROVED <31 DEC 2002 by MorefiRH>  
**Review Markings:**

Declassified/Released  
US Department of State  
EO Systematic Review  
30 JUN 2005

**Review Media Identifier:**  
**Review Referrals:** n/a  
**Review Release Date:** n/a  
**Review Release Event:** n/a  
**Review Transfer Date:**  
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**Status:** NATIVE  
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**TAGS:** ELTN, ETEL, BEXP, XF, SA, SY  
**To:** STATE COM  
**Type:** TE  
**Markings:** Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 30 JUN 2005